

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 16, 2016

Pavel Durov
Founder and CEO
Telegram

Dear Mr. Durov:

We write to communicate our grave concerns about reports regarding the recent migration of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) and their supporters from other social media platforms to Telegram. Terrorists are reportedly using Telegram's encrypted service to disseminate propaganda, drive fundraising, recruit new members, and coordinate attacks.

As U.S. Members of Congress, we are strong advocates for the right to privacy and appreciate Telegram's strong commitment to protecting this right. However, no private company should allow its services to be used to promote terrorism and plan out attacks that spill innocent blood. So we were thankful to see your removal of 78 ISIS-related channels across 12 languages on the heels of last year's attacks in Paris. This, however, is just a start.

Hundreds of channels affiliated with ISIS and other terrorist organizations still find refuge in Telegram's encrypted service. "Nashir News Channel", an outlet of ISIS that delivers pro-ISIS news in several languages and has been suspended on Twitter and YouTube, attracts well over 10,000 regular followers on Telegram. Other ISIS channels have issued calls to target U.S. military bases in the Middle East and facilitated the selling of two prisoners, one from Norway and another from China. "Kill lists" distributed this past summer by ISIS on Telegram included names, addresses, and other personal details of hundreds of U.S. government personnel, police officers, and employees of major U.S. companies. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), one of the most lethal terrorist groups in the world, uses Telegram to release its statements and propaganda. Other terrorist groups such as Hamas, Jabhat Al-Nusra, and the Taliban are also on Telegram. We are troubled at these examples and many others that illustrate how your platform is allowing the spread of terrorist ideology and the coordination of actual terrorist attacks.

Telegram is not the first to face this challenge. It is our hope that Telegram will learn from other social media companies who have successfully maintained their emphasis on privacy while reducing the terrorist footprint on their platforms. They did this by making significant investments over a sustained period of time. These investments included making it easier for users to report terrorist content, having dedicated teams to examine reports and proactively search for terrorist content, using algorithms and other automated mechanisms to assist manual reviews, quickly identifying and removing accounts promoting terrorism, regularly training review teams on what to look for and new ways terrorists are using the platform, and, most recently, coming together to form a shared database of terrorist content.

Terrorists will continue to try to kill innocent people even if social media companies never existed, but it is in the interest of us all to not enable and even support their nefarious actions. We respectfully request that you do all in your power to prevent terrorists from exploiting Telegram to advance its lethal cause.

Sincerely,



Ted Poe
Chairman, Subcommittee on Terrorism,
Nonproliferation, and Trade



Brad Sherman
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Asia
and the Pacific